

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 ISO-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SPC-03 SAM-01 SS-20

RSC-01 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 L-03 PRS-01 DRC-01

(ISO) W

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R 110824Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1098

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USINT ALGIERS

S E C R E T RABAT 0540

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: TS, LY

SUBJ: TUNISIAN-EGYPTIAN MERGER

REF: RABAT 0503

1. IN WIDE-RANGING TOUR D'HORIZON FEBRUARY 8
FOREIGN MINISTER BENHIMA GAVE ME FOLLOWING ACCOUNT
OF REMARKS BY HABIB CHATTY, TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER,
ON HIS RECENT (JAN. 30 - FEB. 1) VISIT HERE.

2. CHATTY HAD SAID THAT SUCH A UNION WAS FIRST DEMANDED
OF BOURGUIBA BY QADHAFI WHEN BOURGUIBA LAST VISITED
LIBYA AND THAT ON THAT OCCASION BOURGUIBA HAD
SAID TO QADHAFI, "WHY DO YOU WANT A UNION WITH
EGYPT WHICH THE EGYPTIANS CLEARLY DON'T WANT? YOU
WOULD BE BETTER OFF TO UNITE WITH US." QADHAFI HAD
REPLIED THAT IF HE WERE TO COME TO NO AGREEMENT WITH
THE EGYPTIANS BY DECEMBER 31 HE WOULD TAKE ACTION.
SHORTLY AFTER THAT DATE IN JANUARY A MEETING WITH
BOURGUIBA WAS PROPOSED AND DJERBA WAS FINALLY DECIDED
UPON AS THE LOCALE. MASMOUDI AND QADHAFI WORKED OUT

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THE SCENARIO IN DETAIL. THE TUNISIANS WERE UNDER

THE IMPRESSION UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT THAT ONLY A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES WAS TO BE PROPOSED, NOT A TRUE UNION. THERE WAS STILL DISPUTE BETWEEN THEM AND THE LIBYANS ON THAT INTERPRETATION.

3. BENHIMA SIAD HE AND THE KING HAD QUESTIONED CHATTY ON THE REASON FOR MERGER WITH LIBYA AND ASKED WHY ALGERIA HAD MUCH MORE IN COMMON THAN TUNISIA AND LIBYA. HE CITED IN PARTICULAR BOUGUIBA'S REMARKS ABOUT RECOGNIZING ISRAEL AND THIS WILLINGNESS TO MEET WITH MRS. MEIR EVEN IN A SYNAGOGUE IF NECESSARY, MADE AT A TIME WHEN QADHAFI WAS TREATING SADAT AS A TRAITOR TO THE ARAB CAUSE BECAUSE OF HIS MODERATION.

4. CHATTY HAD SAID THERE WOULD BE NO SUBMERGING OF TUNISIA NOR WAS THERE ANY UNDERSTANDING THAT QADHAFI WOULD BECOME VICE PRESIDENT OF SUCH A UNION. NO SUCH AUTOMATIC TAKING OVER OF THE PRESIDENCY WAS ENVISAGED. THE PRESIDENT WOULD ALWAYS HAVE TO BE ELECTED. THE FOREIGN MINISTER THEN CITED OTHER "EXPLANATION" BY THE TUNISIANS BY WHICH HE WAS EVIDENTLY NOT CONVINCED. HE THEN RECITED AGAIN DETAILS OF CLOSE CONTACTS BETWEEN RABAT AND TUNIS WHEN NOUIRA RETURNED TO TUNIS (RABAT'S 0279 OF JAN. 22) AND RABAT'S ENOURAGEMENT TO NOUIRA TO IMPOSE SECURITY AND TO SECURE PARTICULARLY THE PERSON OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. HE FEELS, AS HE HAS SAID BEFORE, THAT SITUATION IS NOT FULLY STABILIZED AND SAID EVERYONE WONDERS WHAT QADHAFI'S AND MASMOUDI'S COUNTER-MOVES WILL BE. THIS CREATES SOME APPREHENSION.

NOTE: ABOVE ACCOUNT CONSONANT WITH THAT GIVEN BY IRANIAN AMBASSADOR AND REPORTED REFTEL.
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